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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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November 28, 2000

PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF SERVICEMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES TO VOTE!

Dear Colleague:

Members of the U.S. military and the families who support them make significant contributions to the safety and welfare of the United States of America. The least we can do for them is to ensure that they have ready access to a polling place and that their votes are counted.

In 1986, Congress passed the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act by voice vote. The purpose of that legislation was to ensure that military personnel as well as civilians who are eligible to vote, but are outside of the United States during the period in which an election is held, get the opportunity to exercise their fundamental right to vote. That legislation also provided that the mailing of military and overseas balloting materials "shall be carried expeditiously and free of postage."

For this year's election, there is evidence that military voters may not have received ballots on time, that those ballots may not have been delivered expeditiously, and even when received on time, may not have been counted by local election officials. This is unacceptable.

Similarly, long before the general election, our Committee opposed the decision by the Clinton-Gore Administration to disallow voting booths on military facilities. I introduced the Military Family Voting Rights Bill (H.R. 5174) to allow election officials to continue to set up polls on remote military facilities for the benefit of military personnel, their families, and the supporting community.

H.R. 5174 assists service personnel, their families, and the people who support these isolated bases, to continue to exercise their right to vote. This bill did not attempt to force a new mission onto the military as argued by the Clinton-Administration. Rather, it allows the practice of setting up voting booths on military facilities to continue where it is appropriate.

I was pleased that more than two-thirds of the House voted to pass H.R. 5174 last month, however, I was saddened by the opposition from the Clinton-Gore Administration and the hold put on the bill by Senate Democrats. People in the military work hard enough and endure many hardships by living in isolation. We should not make it more difficult for them to vote. We should make it easier.

Congress needs to investigate why the will of Congress is being ignored and why military personnel and their families are being disenfranchised. All House Members should encourage the Senate to pass H.R. 5174. Our service men and women put their lives on the line for freedom. The least Congress can do is make sure their right to vote is not imperiled.

Sincerely,



Chairman